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What's missing in magazines

Mitch Fraas

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What's missing in magazines

Abstract

Short essay on the differences between bound sets of 19th century periodicals in library settings and the physical originals.

Keywords

Periodicals

Disciplines

English Language and Literature | History | Library and Information Science

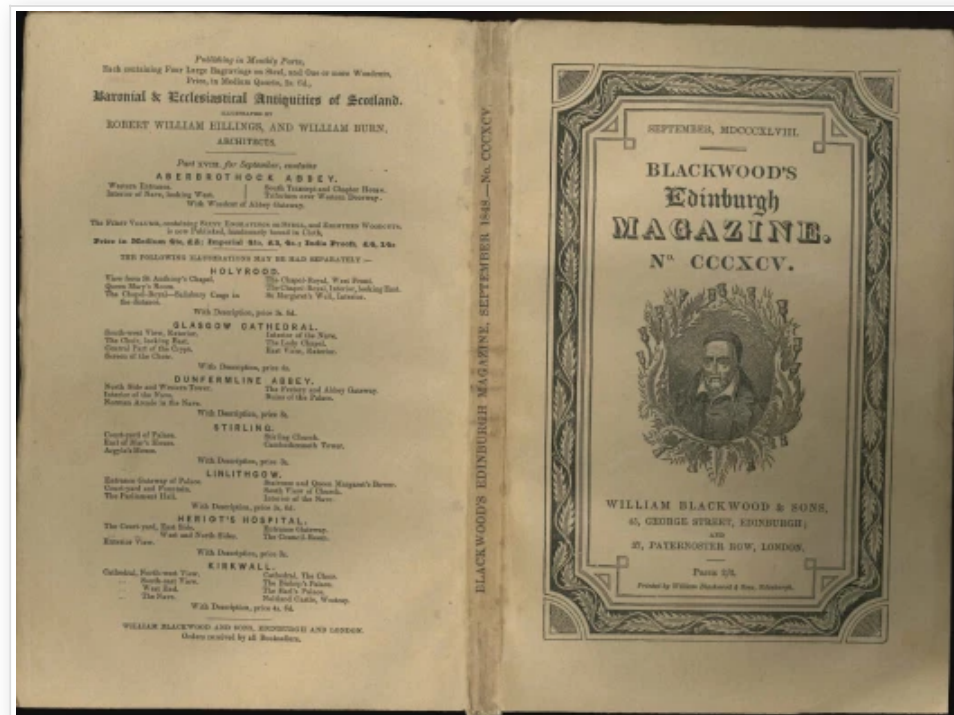
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What's missing in magazines

POSTED BY MITCH FRAAS IN POSTS

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— *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. UPenn AP4 .B6 copy 3, issue 395. Paper covers

♣ WELCOME

Welcome to Unique at Penn, part of the family of University of Pennsylvania Libraries blogs. Every week this space will feature descriptions and contextualization of items from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The site focuses on those materials held by Penn which are in some sense "unique" - drawn from both our special and circulating collections, whether a one-of-a-kind medieval manuscript or a twentieth-century popular novel with generations of student notes penciled inside. See the About page for more on the blog and to contact the editor.

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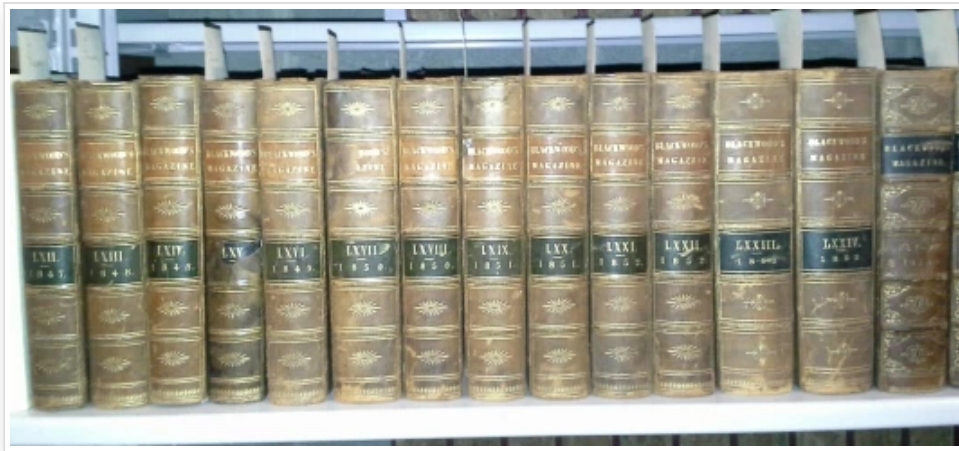
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What is it that you read when you read a print copy of a magazine in a library or as a digital photograph from an online source? Though plenty of strange things happen to monographs, bindings are removed, plates sometimes missing or not scanned, fold-outs mangled, periodicals are particularly fluid material texts, often intended to be preserved in different formats than they were sold right from the start – think of those shelves of bound journals sitting in the stacks of university libraries, or even your old copy of the *New Yorker* missing all those annoying subscription cards.

With the advent of mass digitization projects like Google Books, the Internet Archive, and Hathi Trust, long runs of periodicals before 1923 totaling millions of pages have been made readily available to the wider world. This is especially important for those who work on nineteenth century literary culture – which, particularly in the United States and Great Britain, depended heavily on the periodical press. Many of the great books and authors of the period appeared first in magazines and journals. The various literary and political periodicals of the day had large subscription bases, sometimes publishing dual editions on both sides of the Atlantic. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* was one of these heavyweights. Published between 1817 and 1905 (and in another form until 1980) in Edinburgh, London, and New York the magazine featured nearly all the great authors of the day including George Eliot whose *Middlemarch* first appeared in eight issues of the journal [1].

Long runs of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* can be found in most British and American research libraries and as such there is also a proliferation of digital copies online – 5 separate copies of each volume of the British edition and 3 of the American at my last count [2]. Yet, none of these online copies nor likely most of the physical copies found in libraries exist in their original form

- August 2018
- December 2017
- November 2017
- July 2017
- October 2016
- July 2016
- June 2016
- May 2016
- March 2016
- December 2015
- November 2015
- October 2015
- September 2015
- August 2015
- June 2015
- March 2015
- February 2015
- January 2015
- October 2014
- September 2014
- July 2014
- June 2014
- May 2014
- April 2014
- February 2014
- January 2014
- December 2013
- November 2013



— Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. UPenn AP4.B6 copy 1. Row of volumes in the Special Collections stacks.

The shelves of *Blackwood's* at Penn above are pretty typical. Each issue from a particular intellectual "volume" (e.g. volume 48) of the magazine has been bound up with other issues to form a physical volume. The volumes themselves are bound for ready browsing and reading in typical period style and it's clear that many readers of the day had their own copies bound as soon as the volume was completed. Below for example you can see the final page of text for the August 1848 issue of volume 48 of *Blackwood's* on the left with the text for the September 1848 issue beginning immediately on the facing page.

- October 2013
- September 2013
- August 2013
- July 2013
- June 2013
- May 2013
- April 2013
- March 2013
- February 2013
- January 2013
- December 2012
- October 2012
- September 2012
- August 2012
- July 2012
- June 2012
- May 2012

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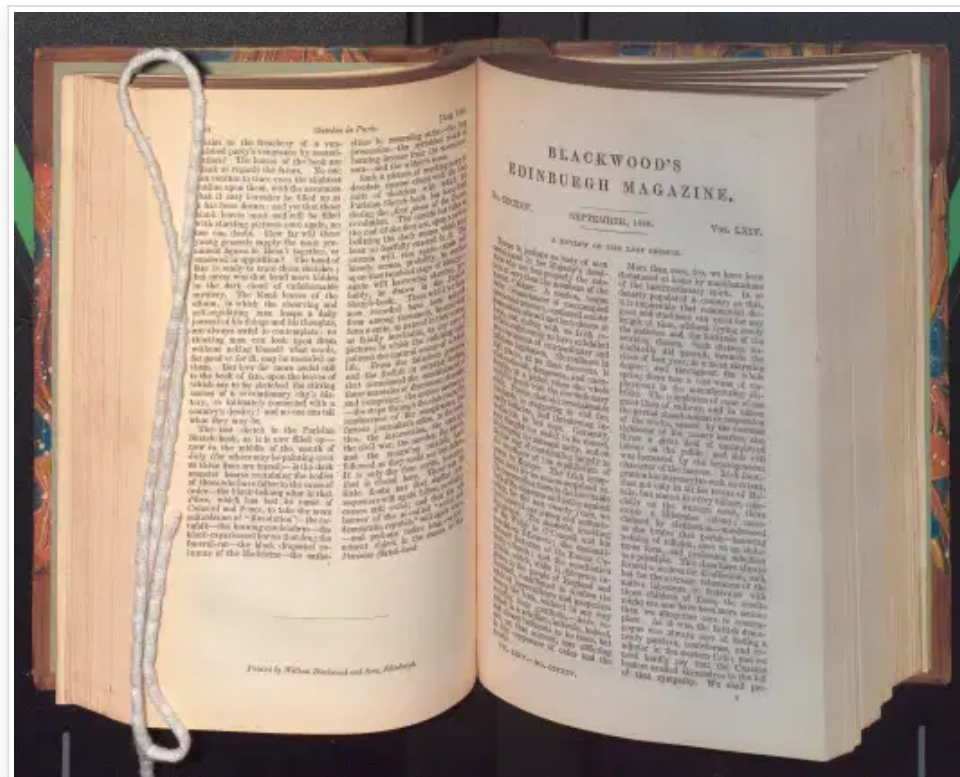
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— *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. UPenn AP4.B6 copy 1 vol. 48.



— Digital images of the UC-Berkeley, Penn State University, and University of Iowa copies of *Blackwood's* for September 1848.

This view of the magazine, with one month quickly transitioning to the next, in both print and digital form, represents only one view of the text. The form in which they arrived to readers in the post or at the local bookseller looked quite a bit different. Recently we acquired here a set of six issues of *Blackwood's Magazine* which have survived in their original state [3]. Bound in paper

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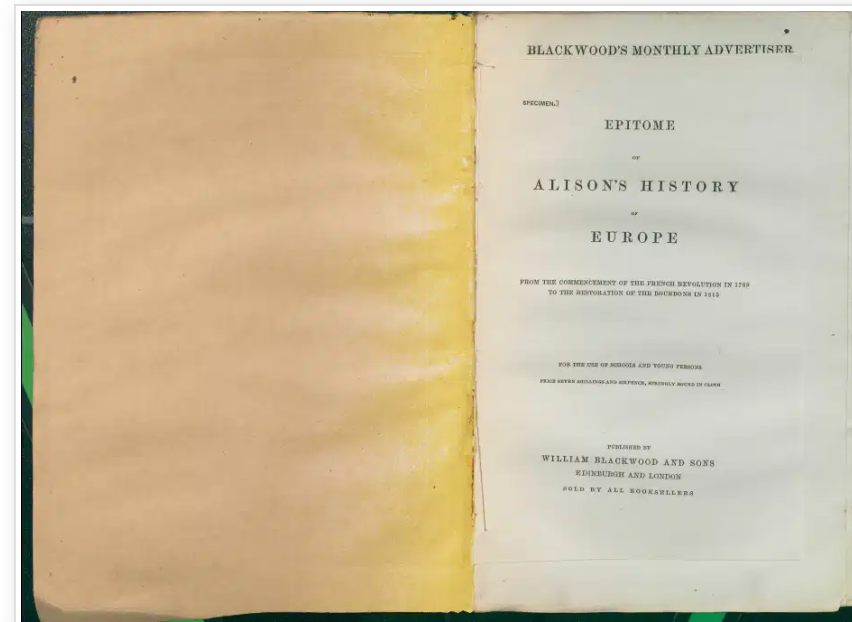
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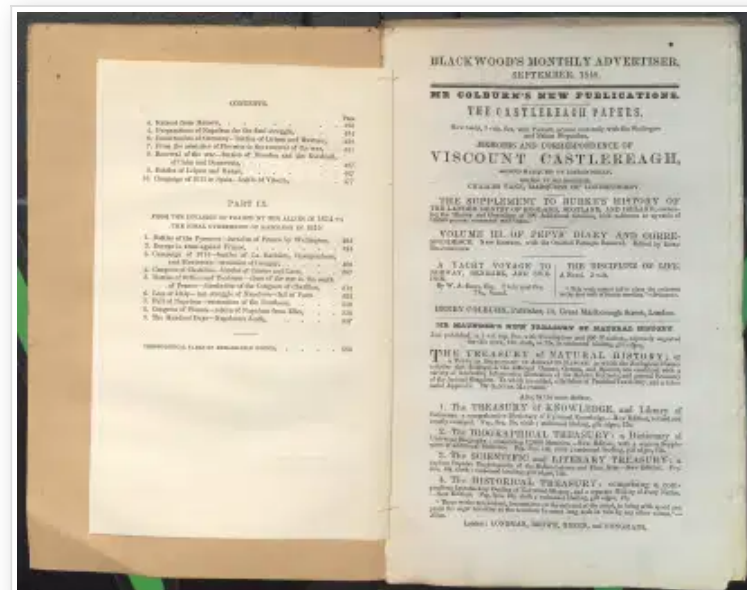
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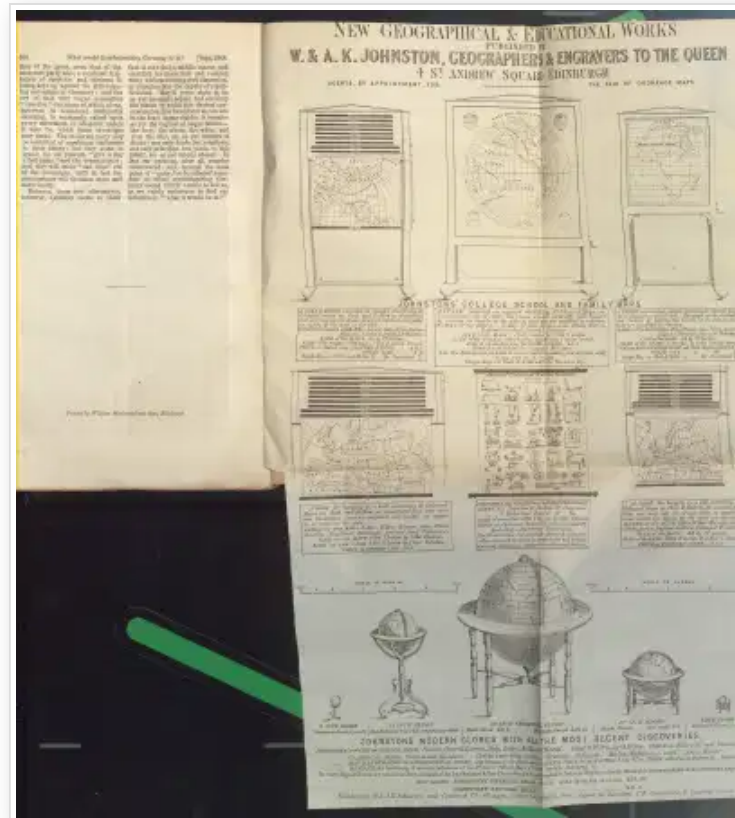
wrappers individually labeled with the month of issue and bearing advertisements on the back, these issues also retain a cache of advertising and other ephemeral material excised from all other copies I've seen.



— Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. UPenn AP4.B6 copy 3, issue 395.

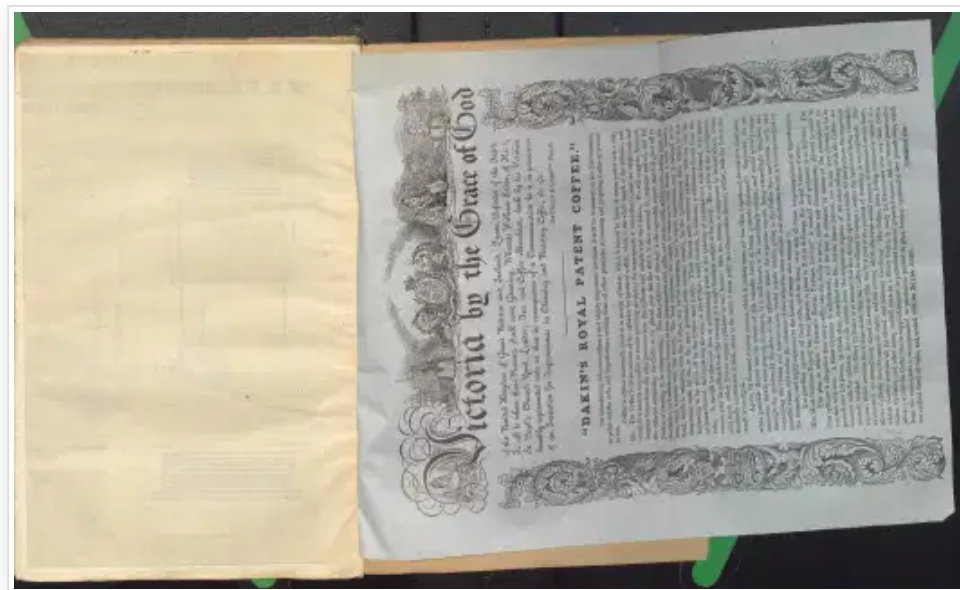


to their useful role as wayfinders in such a densely packed magazine.



— *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. UPenn AP4.B6 copy 3, issue 395.

The rear of this particular issue also bears a few pleasant surprises. Where the bound-up copies of the magazine simply move on to October, the original issue contains two elaborate advertising fold-out broadsides. The first for educational maps and globes with some fantastic illustrations and the second a coffee advert on a nice blue paper.



— *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. UPenn AP4.B6 copy 3, issue 395.

Taken all together, the copy of *Blackwood's* no. 395 for September 1848 now at Penn includes 17 leaves not present in the bound-up copies found on library shelves and in Google Books – or to put it another way, these widely available copies are missing 20% of their original material. This has been noted by scholars of the periodical culture before – Christine Bold for instance writes, “When Libraries...cut advertisements from periodicals in binding them, crucial material and cultural components of the print network were lost” but seeing these physical examples really brought home to me that loss [6]. That being said, I think placing the blame entirely on modern libraries may be slightly off-target. Like with those annoying subscription cards in magazines today, nineteenth-century readers also wanted to be able to separate their meaty reading material from advertisements as seen in how these periodicals were produced and sold. All of the advertising material appears outside of the gathering structure of the issue and is sewn-in quite haphazardly, clearly intended for ease of removal. Likewise, the conscious use by publishers of running pagination across issues and the conceit of having complete “volumes” indicate how intentionally ephemeral these inserts were. Some magazines even sold bound volumes of their work at the end of the year or offered exchanges for the individual issues [7]. Nonetheless, in a world where massive amounts of

textual information are made even more readily available, these as-issued magazines serve as a good reminder of the need to always understand the material origins of our sources.

[1] For more on *Blackwood's* see Margaret Drabble, "Blackwood's Magazine". *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Ed. Jenny Stringer and Daniel Hahn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Robert Morrison and Daniel S. Roberts eds. *Romanticism and Blackwood's Magazine: 'An Unprecedented Phenomenon'* Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[2] The five copies of the British edition are provided by [Iowa](#), [Penn State](#), [Michigan](#), [UC-Berkeley](#), and [Oxford](#). The three copies of the American edition are provided by [Harvard](#) (with paper covers still intact but no advertising), [Princeton](#), and the [NYPL](#).

[3] This was a serendipitous find at a used bookstore in Philadelphia. Many thanks are due to the book historian Jessica Linker who while browsing the shop with me pointed out this strange pile of issues sitting on a shelf.

[4] While the Epitome of Alison's history of Europe advertised here went through many editions, I can only locate copies of [later editions](#) in OCLC.

[5] It's tantalizing to think that the Monthly Advertiser sheets would have been gathered up and bound together as annual volumes but I have yet to locate any.

[6] Christine Bold ed., *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*, Volume 6 (Oxford, 2011), p. 639.

[7] See for instance [these instructions to subscribers](#) in an 1827 issue of the Methodist Magazine.

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About Mitch Fraas

Mitch Fraas is a curator at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

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